Background and rationale behind the School Development Plan 2021-2022

Introduction

The format of this year's school development plan has evolved, primarily as a result of feedback from the governing body which suggested that its impact ought to be more measurable. This document outlines the rationale behind the decisions we (the Senior Leadership Team) have made in terms of both our high-level key improvement areas and the priorities within them. We will track progress towards our priorities using the key performance indicators (KPIs) outlined in the School Development Plan Tracker 2021-2022, a working document that will be updated on a termly basis before each Full Governing Body meeting.

It is traditional for a school's development plan to span three years but given that the ongoing impact of Covid-19 is still unknown, we thought it prudent to plan for just one year again this academic year. It allows us to be more flexible in the face of ever-changing events.

A more recent development is the news of the Headmaster's retirement at Easter 2022. As we navigate the transition between headteachers this academic year, it also makes sense to remain flexible and therefore plan for one year.

Key improvement areas

This year, we've maintained four of the key improvement areas from last academic year (leadership, quality of education, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and personal development) and have added three more (behaviour and attitudes, site and premises and human resources). Thanks to the exceptional work in the area of teaching, learning and CPD this past year, this no longer has its own key improvement area. It's referenced instead as one of the priorities under quality of education.

Five of the seven key improvement areas in this year's plan are in line with Ofsted's areas of judgement. This is intentional. As of September 2021, Ofsted removed the inspection exemption from outstanding schools. Given that our last inspection was over a decade ago, we can expect that we'll be near the top of the list for a Section 8 (full) inspection this year. It is important, therefore, that we are prepared for this; that we understand what Ofsted are looking for and can talk to it confidently in the context of our provision.

We've also added two other key improvement areas, namely site and premises and human resources. Although their impact on the education of our students is indirect, we feel that looking after our site and our staff is equally as important in ensuring they get the best possible outcomes.

This year's key improvement areas, and the priorities within them, are as follows:

1 - Leadership

Objective: Leadership at all levels is robust and persistent such that the highest professional standards are met by every single member of staff.

Measure: Achieve a Grade 1 for Leadership and Management at our next Ofsted visit

Covid-19 has presented previously unimaginable challenges for the leadership team over the last two years. If the significant changes to the way we operate weren't enough, we've also had to manage the fears and anxieties of our staff in the face of continued uncertainty. We're extremely proud to have put in place processes that enabled us to remain open to all students for as long as we did, and to also have had the capacity to make progress towards our strategic plans.

These achievements are even more impressive when you consider that the structure of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has seen significant change itself over the last few years, with around half of the team being new. We've used this opportunity to recruit and develop the team to best suit the priorities of the school. One of the biggest impacts has been to formalise the lines of accountability.

In a similar vein, we have increased the number of middle leadership roles, and have appointed two Heads of Key Stage and two additional Heads of Faculty. The benefits of this are twofold: firstly, it allows us to achieve greater levels of accountability, and secondly, it has given our talented staff more opportunities for progression.

We have also embarked upon a process of aligning and standardising our management processes (including ERPs, appraisal and line management meetings) in order to ensure consistency in both staff experience and expectations. It is this work that we hope to build upon over the course of the next academic year, alongside focused efforts on addressing our structural deficit and embedding our commitment to diversity and equality across the school. As such, our priorities, and the rationales behind them, are:

1.1 Management of return to school in September and beyond:
We hope to experience as 'normal' a year as possible in order to aid students' recovery from the disruption of Covid-19. We will therefore take all the necessary steps to ensure that students can return safely and remain in school for the entirety of the academic year. These steps include the implementation of government guidance around Covid-19, and the reestablishment of our high expectations in relation to behaviour.

1.2 Strengthening of key quality assurance practices:
We will continue to build on the progress made towards this last year and further align the work of staff with the vision and ethos of the school. This promotes efficiency (with everybody working towards the same priorities, we can make more of an impact) and improves motivation (it's important that staff feel connected to the future of the school).

1.3 <u>Standardisation and development of Middle Leaders (MLs)</u>:
They say that people leave managers, not organisations. With it still being difficult to recruit within some subject areas, it's important that we retain the talented members of staff that we have. Ensuring a consistency of approach to leadership and management through the development of our middle leaders is one way to achieve this.

1.4 <u>Maintenance of robust and up-to-date safeguarding procedures</u>:
As a school, we take our responsibilities towards safeguarding very seriously. It is of vital importance, therefore, that the mechanisms that are in place to assist staff to understand and discharge their role and responsibilities in promoting the welfare of all students and protecting them against harm are updated regularly.

1.5 <u>Implementation of the financial recovery plan</u>:
In order to be able to support the future development of the school, it is critical that we reduce the existing structural deficit of £259,000. A recovery plan was put in place in the summer of 2019 and, inspite of the disruption caused by the national lockdown, the school is on track to eliminate the deficit by 2022. This year, we also hope to make significant progress by improving financial control through the introduction of a more robust budget setting and monitoring system to enable transparency and accountability at all levels.

1.6 <u>Embedding of the equalities policy into all areas of school life</u>:
The Parmiter's community has changed significantly over the last decade and we strongly believe that the school environment should reflect this. We aim to celebrate diversity and remove inequality by promoting open conversations among all stakeholders both in and outside of the curriculum.

2 - Quality of education

Objective: *All students experience an inspirational and engaging curriculum and learning experience in which they have the opportunity to thrive academically.*

Measure: *Achieve a Grade 1 for Quality of Education (inc. Sixth Form) at our next Ofsted visit*

Despite the significant challenges posed by Covid-19 over the past two years, this is one of the areas in which we have made most significant progress. The story starts before Covid with our last set of 'normal' school exam results in 2019. It was a banner year for the school, achieving a Progress 8 score of 0.54 (national average = 0) at GCSE and Level 3 Value-Added (L3VA) score of 0.3 (national average = 0) at A-level. Although the outcomes from the following years were less comparable due to the nature of the way grades were awarded, the centre-assessed grades (CAGs) of 2020 and teacher-assessed grades (TAGs) of 2021 still put us significantly above the national average.

The successes we've seen over the last three years are largely thanks to the work done to raise the profile of teaching and learning across the school. Various channels have been set up in order to introduce new ideas to staff and ultimately help them to evolve their practice in the classroom. They have proved invaluable in supporting our ongoing, whole-school move to the Google for Education platform and individual devices, as well as the development of our remote learning provision and students' independent study skills during the height of the pandemic. We also used these mechanisms to help us review and develop the robustness of our assessment practices, which proved to be time well spent when formal exams were cancelled again in 2021.

Our confidence in the standard of our teaching and learning led to us founding the Watford Partnership for Teacher Training (WPfTT) in response to the government's move away from Teaching School Alliances. The WPfTT, which is partnered with the University of Hertfordshire and Herts for Learning, puts Parmiter's at the heart of Initial Teaching Training and the development of Early Careers Teachers (formerly NQTs). By showcasing the expertise of our staff, we hope to raise the standards of teaching and learning across the local area, thereby increasing the pool of high-quality teachers to recruit from in the future.

While we are exceptionally proud of all we've achieved in this area, particularly in the last academic year, there is still plenty more to do in terms of embedding existing initiatives and introducing new ones. As such, our priorities for this year, and the rationales behind them, are:

2.1 Clarification of curriculum aims and practices across all staff:
We know that teaching and learning at Parmiter's is exceptional but we want our staff to be confident in talking about *why* it is exceptional. This year, we will update, formalise and share the documentation around our whole-school curriculum aims and the intent, implementation and impact of the curriculum at a departmental level with all relevant stakeholders.

2.2a Effective use of Chromebooks and one-to-one devices across the school:
The pandemic has seen us accelerate our plan to introduce one-to-one devices to all students at Parmiter's by three years. Having introduced them to students in Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12, we now need to focus on developing their use in teaching and learning so that they best complement the studies of next year's Year 11 and 13 students.

2.2b Delivery and development of Artsmark goals:
In order to shine a light on our exceptional arts provision and promote the uptake of creative subjects at both GCSE and A-level, we are excited to have been accepted on the journey towards Artsmark accreditation. We hope to use this as a vehicle to establish a culture of participation in, and experience of, performance and arts both within and beyond the curriculum.

2.2c Identification and roll-out of whole-school literacy initiatives:
Without good literacy skills, students will struggle to access the curriculum and/or demonstrate what they are capable of. Previous initiatives have had mixed success and so this year the focus is on developing a long-term, joined-up strategy for the promotion of whole-school literacy

initiatives that 'stick' from both a staff and student perspective.

2.3 <u>Maintenance of relevant, high-quality continuous professional development provision</u>:
When it comes to ensuring that the quality of education at Parmiter's is and remains exceptional, our greatest asset is our staff. As such, we will review our provision with the aim of creating a research-informed action plan to help us improve the relevance and value of next academic year's professional development appraisal targets.

3 - Disadvantaged and vulnerable students

Objective: *Students from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or those with SEND leave Parmiter's with the qualifications, confidence and skills they need to be personally and economically successful in their future life.*

Measure: *Reduce the achievement and engagement gap between vulnerable and non-vulnerable students in all areas of school life.*

For context, our definition of disadvantaged and vulnerable students includes those who receive pupil premium (PP), children looked after (CLA) and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Over the last few years, we have seen an increase in the number of vulnerable students at Parmiter's and, accordingly, in the range and complexity of their needs. In response, we have begun to develop the provision that we offer to ensure they each receive truly personalised support. We are, for example, developing the structure of the Curriculum Support team to maximise the breadth and quantity of support they are able to offer in terms of personalised intervention. We have also employed a part-time tutor with a primary background to work in a one-to-one capacity with students in the core subjects.

Additionally, we are in the process of joining-up the support these students receive at both a curriculum and pastoral level by increasing the opportunities for communication between relevant teams. One notable change is that our Heads of Key Stage now support the process of identifying students in Years 7 to 11 that may benefit from intervention, as well as the tracking and monitoring of the intervention that they attend. This is helping us to get a better all-round picture of the impact of the support we offer individual students.

Despite these improvements, the achievement and engagement gap between vulnerable and non-vulnerable students continues to increase both nationally and at Parmiter's. While the challenges of the pandemic undoubtedly have a part to play, it is crucial that we put in place the support required to reduce the gap this academic year. As such, our priorities for this year, and the rationales behind them, are:

3.1 Effective deployment of the Curriculum Support staff:
We will build on the work started in terms of reviewing and strengthening the impact of the Curriculum Support team on student outcomes through the consideration of alternative staffing structures and the prioritisation of their areas of focus and development.

3.2a Consistency in the support strategies offered by all staff to PP and SEND students:
In order to ensure that vulnerable students make progress in line with their non-vulnerable peers, staff need to be aware of both who the vulnerable students are, and the types of strategies they can employ to support them in class. As such, this year's focus is on increasing the number of formal ways through which to disseminate this information.

3.2b Consistency in the support strategies offered by all staff to CLA students:
While one of the aims here is to improve communication about the progress of our CLA students with staff (as above), the focus is still mainly on ensuring that these students are accessing the support that is most relevant to them and their specific needs.

3.3 Tracking and monitoring of student progress to ensure the best outcomes:
We are good at tracking students' progress in relation to intervention but want to make this more transparent to ensure its efficacy this year. As such, we will better coordinate intervention so that it is timely and will therefore have the biggest impact on student progress, and so that resources are directed proportionately across all students.

4 - Behaviour and attitudes

Objective: *Staff have consistently high expectations of all students who, in turn, understand the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning, conduct and interaction with others.*

Measure: *Achieve a Grade 1 for Behaviour and Attitudes at our next Ofsted visit*

At Parmiter's, we view poor behaviour and attitudes to learning as barriers to accessing the curriculum. As such, it's of paramount importance that students understand the reasons behind, and ultimately take responsibility for following, the expectations we set out for them.

The last few years have seen the rationalisation and formalisation of many of the existing behaviour management systems in the school. Thanks to the introduction of a rewards and sanctions system via SIMS, pastoral leaders and form tutors are now able to monitor, and hold students accountable for, their behaviour and attitudes. We have also replaced effort grades with more meaningful Attitude to Learning (AtL) grades, which help students to understand the behaviours they need to demonstrate to become an exceptional learner. Both of these measures are tracked over time to ensure the speedy identification of any long-term issues.

More recently, we have appointed two Heads of Key Stage (one for Key Stage 3, and one for Key Stage 4) who are working with the Head of Humanities and our SEND Coordinator to

ensure the approach to personal development and the support of our vulnerable students is joined-up. They have also strengthened the lines of accountability for year team leaders and their form tutors, which has helped to raise the standards of the pastoral provision.

This year, we hope to embed this further into our existing practice and, as such, our priorities, and the rationales behind them, are:

4.1 <u>Review and development of pastoral practices</u>:
The most important outcome of any work in this area is to identify issues and intervene with mechanisms for support in a timely manner. The data we collect, track and monitor helps us to do this, but the relationships between students and staff can be just as vital. It's therefore important that we continually review and develop our existing practices to promote this side of the role.

4.2 <u>Strengthening of the collaboration between parents/carers and external partners</u>:
We work closely with parents to ensure that our students have the best possible support at home. As a result of Covid, there have been fewer face-to-face opportunities for staff to engage with parents over the last 18 months which can make it tricker for them to have honest conversations about their child's progress. We want to address this by implementing a system that encourages staff to get in touch with parents sooner.

In the same vein, we've built excellent relationships with external agencies to ensure that our students get the very best opportunities available to them. We want to expand the number of partners we work with in order to cater for the breadth of students' needs within our school.

4.3 <u>Establishment of a whole-school approach to student wellbeing and mental health</u>:
Across the country, it seems that the prevalence of mental health issues in students is increasing. However, the provision for the mental health of young people has not. Those requiring support can sometimes wait a long time to access the help they need. As such, we will take steps to understand how we broaden our offer of support to students with mental health issues within the financial and time constraints of the school.

5 - Personal development

Objective: *All students aspire to find a path that best suits the individual, having developed the discipline, moral character and resilience to become a considerate and responsible member of society.*

Measure: *Achieve a Grade 1 for Personal Development at our next Ofsted visit.*

Our vision states: *Our primary aim is for each Parmiterian to aspire to find the path that best suits the individual, having developed the discipline, moral character and resilience to become a considerate and responsible member of society.*

Personal development has always been an important part of life at Parmiter's and has consequently always been taught as a discrete subject (albeit under a number of different guises). When Ofsted announced its intention to judge personal development separately in 2019, we took steps to formalise our existing approach.

While we firmly believe that every teacher should be a teacher of Personal Development and that elements of it should be embedded across all aspects of the curriculum, we've focused our initial efforts on the development of a coherent whole-school programme. We're ultimately aiming to bring together dedicated curriculum time, form time and assemblies into one joined-up offering for our students. Last year, we appointed a Head of Humanities to oversee the creation and delivery of this programme and are looking forward to seeing how it is implemented this academic year. As such, our priorities, and the rationales behind them, are:

5.1 Implementation and promotion of school-wide Personal Development programme:
Our joined-up Personal Development programme will be delivered for the first time this academic year. We will review each of the elements from both a staff and student perspective in order to inform future planning, and understand how best to embed the subject across all areas of the curriculum.

5.2a Reintroduction of opportunities for student leadership:
We were forced to put many of our opportunities for student leadership on hold as a result of the pandemic. We now need to reintroduce these opportunities for students to contribute to the development of the school and develop valuable life skills. We will identify and celebrate a number of quick wins to raise the profile of these opportunities and encourage participation.

5.2b Reintroduction of opportunities for student participation:
Again, we were forced to put a hold on many of our opportunities for student participation in extra-curricular or enrichment activities as a result of the pandemic. In order to aid students' recovery from the disruption, we will aim to get each one into an activity that will best broaden and nurture their interests.

5.3 Transition and development of careers guidance:
We have recently appointed a Careers Advisor who is qualified but new to the role. We will work closely with her to develop the role in a way that best supports her transition and development, as well as the wider Personal Development agenda.

6 - Site and premises

Objective: *The learning environment is both improved and maintained so that it is positive, inclusive and fit for purpose.*

Measure: Present a comprehensive, three-year strategy for site maintenance and improvements alongside the new School Development Plan in July 2022.

Despite the structural deficit and the fact that we were without a Business Director for the first part of this academic year, site improvements continued in earnest. We started the build of the new Science block, won two CIF bids to fund improvements to failing roofs and drainage and refurbished the fitness suite so that it became fit for purpose for students, staff and paying customers alike.

Now our new Business Director is firmly established, the focus is on conducting a thorough review of the site and current staffing structures and practices in order to plan for the future. As such, our priorities for this year, and the rationales behind them, are:

6.1 <u>Opening of new Science block and the demolition and landscaping of the old block</u>:
While the move has already been made, there is still plenty to do in terms of identifying and fixing snags in the new building, demolishing the old block and landscaping the empty space. Each part of the project has the potential to impact movement around the school site or disrupt learning. We will regularly review each stage of the project in order to minimise this.

6.2 <u>Creation of planned preventative maintenance strategy</u>:
In order to better understand the state of various parts of the school site, we will commission a condition survey. The information we gather from this will enable us to create a long-term plan for repairs and improvements. This, in turn, will enable us to target our resources where they are most needed, and can be used to support funding bids as required.

6.3 <u>Prioritisation of improvements across the school</u>:
The completion of the condition survey will also help us to better plan for the prioritisation of improvements in the future. In the meantime, we will continue to bid for CIF funding and to identify other funding opportunities for essential projects. We will also complete a thorough review of the work of all teams to understand where efficiencies can be made.

7 - Human resources

Objective: The school attracts talented people to all roles within the school, and retains existing staff through the promotion of a positive, supportive and productive working environment.

Measure: Maintain a full complement of staff until July 2022. No member of staff opts to leave as a result of internal issues.

One of the biggest challenges we've faced over the last few years is the recruitment of high-quality teachers into hard-to-fill roles. While we are, and always have been, fairly confident in our offering to potential candidates, it was no match for the nationwide teacher shortage.

We have spent much of the last few years investing time and money into resources that help us to continue to recruit high-quality candidates despite the shortage. This includes significant investment into a subscription to Tes (supported by the Foundation) which continues to give us access to the widest pool of potential candidates from across the country. In addition, the HR and Recruitment Officer role has been developed to support the recruitment process as well as formalise and create efficiencies in our processes.

More recently, we have started to develop an informal HR function within the school, supported by a subscription to Herts for Learning's core HR service. This helps us to manage individual cases or incidences with confidence. Alongside this, we have developed a new whole-school approach to staff wellbeing and workload which is built on foundational principles rather than one-off initiatives.

We know that our staff are our greatest asset and are keen to do all that we can to retain them. As such, our priorities for this year, and the rationales behind them, are:

7.1 Consistency in recruitment practices:
In line with our commitment to equality and diversity, we will review both our internal and external recruitment processes to ensure that there is both consistency and transparency. Every candidate should feel that they have equality of opportunity. This will ultimately enable us to recruit the right person to the right role at the right time.

7.2 Development of staff wellbeing provision:
Our work on staff wellbeing has so far focused primarily on policy and the review and selection of appropriate avenues of support. Both the principles of the policy and the avenues of support need embedding into the way we think about not only our own work-life balance, but also the way we manage others.

7.3 Provision of valuable personal development opportunities:
Last year, we developed a hypothesis that there may be more we can do to ensure that personal development opportunities are both valuable and relevant to staff. This year, we will test that hypothesis and assess staff's perception of the current provision in order to understand how we might offer a more diverse and/or personalised approach going forward.